1988–The Crisis in Marxist Cultural Theory

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ABSTRACT   1988 signaled a major year for cultural studies with the publication of several significant texts: The collection of essays *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" by Gayatri Spivak, and *The Hard Road to Renewal*, Stuart Hall's book on Thatcherism. Despite these texts' divergent purposes, themes, and theories, they can be productively read together for their unique contributions to Marxist cultural theory. In the decades preceding their publication, a resurgence in scholarship devoted to Marxism had emerged, as scholars grappled with both its internal issues as well as its increasingly apparent insufficiency to explain current social formations. As Grossberg and Nelson explain in the introduction to *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Marxism was "paradoxically at once undergoing a renaissance of activity and a crisis of definition." In this essay, we elucidate how each text contributed to cultural studies and particularly highlight how each intervened on this redefinition of Marxism.

Introduction

This essay addresses the development, contestation, and challenging of Marxism by the field of cultural studies through the lens of three representative texts. By 1988, many cultural studies scholars believed they had reached a "crisis of Marxism." Although many theorists have argued that Marxism has experienced multiple "crises," each one has occurred differently—Marxism, as theory and praxis, has always responded to its historical context.[1] Consequently, Marx's work was developed to address the periodic tendencies that emerged out of the contradictions within the capitalist production process and that manifested in the social formation. As Barry Smart posited, this new crisis "has a qualitatively different significance, for it denotes that a decisive moment or a historic turning point has been reached," and Smart located this change in the fact that the current crisis "encompasses Marxists, fellow-travelers and radical social theorists alike."[2] Smart thus marked a more radical rethinking of Marxism due to his recognition that its most ardent supporters were engaging in serious critiques about its fundamental tenets.

In this essay, we approach this issue of the "crisis of Marxism" through an analysis of three defining publications from 1988—a major year for cultural studies with the publication of several significant texts: the collection of essays *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, the essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" by Gayatri Spivak, and *The Hard Road to Renewal*, Stuart Hall's book on Thatcherism. Despite these texts' divergent purposes and themes, they can be productively read together for their unique contributions to Marxist cultural theory and for their encapsulation of broader debates and conversations in the field. As Grossberg and Nelson explain in the introduction to *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Marxism was "paradoxically at once undergoing a renaissance of activity and a crisis of definition."[3] In this essay, we explicate how each text contributed to cultural studies and elucidate how each intervened on this redefinition of Marxism. Each text was—and continues to be—contentious in multiple ways. For example, Paul Smith framed *Marxism*

and the Interpretation of Culture as an attack on Marxism, claiming that its "failures" discussed in that text actually stemmed from the ways cultural studies had developed as a discipline, not from problems within Marxism.[4]

To understand these texts, and the year as a whole, we first provide an overview of the "crisis of Marxism" that emerged in the 1980s and its relationship to cultural studies. To do this, we work to historicize this moment of crisis through the analysis and discussion of several important theorists within their specific postwar contexts. This historical context —approaching the neoliberal moment, at the same time that theorists turned away from Althusser and discourse analysis based in Gramsci's thought—grounds the framing and the reading of these three texts together.

The Crisis of Marxism

The controversial nature of these texts requires that they are understood within the broader theoretical changes and disputes of Marxist theory that preceded and situated them. Scholars grappled with both Marxist theory's internal issues as well as its increasingly apparent insufficiency to explain current social formations. Specifically, scholars such as Poulantzas, Hindess, and Hirst leveraged the Althusserian conceptions of "social formations" and "modes of production" to reorient cultural studies towards a Marxist frame. In his book, *State, Power, Socialism*, Poulantzas uses these concepts to combat the often "gestalt" framing of the capitalist "State" as a "simple realization of the-State-of-the-capitalist-mode-of-production."[5] According to Poulantzas, "social formations are the actual sites of the existence and reproduction of modes of production. They are thus also the sites of the various forms of State, none of which can simply be deduced from the capitalist type of State understood as denoting an abstract formal object [. . .] A theory of the capitalist State can be elaborated only if it is brought into relation with the history of political struggles under capitalism."[6] For Poulantzas, then, cultural studies scholarship that attends to the historically and politically situated articulations of social formations and modes of production are necessary in conceptualizing a more nuanced Marxist perspective on the capitalist State.

Hindess and Hirst also grapple with the implications of social formations and modes of production in their book *Mode of Production and Social Formation: An Auto-Critique of Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production.* The authors offer a new take on these terms by suggesting that the conception of modes of production needs to be "displaced" in favor of another Marxist concept, the "relations of production." As the authors state, "we argue that it is necessary to develop (instead of concepts of modes of production) concepts of relations of production and their conditions of existence [. . .] As the concept of modes of productions is displaced, so the concepts of relations of production and social formations gain theoretical importance."[7] The authors' proposed shift towards "relations of production" here allows for a more holistic approach to studying how social formations are relationally constituted. Both of these texts concomitantly call for more nuanced scholarship about the capitalist State mediated by turning to Althusser's treatment of social formations, further solidifying a renewed vigor for Marxist scholarship in cultural studies during this era.

Throughout the twentieth century, major sociopolitical events initiated a new, stronger confrontation of Marxism. These international sociopolitical events, beginning with the outbreak of World War I, called into question Marxist notions of history and revolution. When the Second International, the federation of socialist parties and trade unions, supported and participated in the war, it was perceived as "the betrayal of proletarian internationalism" and its opposition to nationalism and militarism.[8] According to Douglas Kellner, this conflict led to the collapse of the Second International and "tarnished its

image as a revolutionary movement."[9] In addition, despite the seeming appearance of "a confirmation of Marxism in the Russian Revolution of 1917,"[10] the post-World War I era saw no other significant revolutions of working-class people.[11] Later, Kellner explains, the rise of fascism in the Second World War revealed that "history was not progressing towards democratic socialism and the liberation of the working-class."[12]

The new structure of class relations that formed after World War II continued to trouble Marxist theory regarding conceptions of the revolutionary subject and working-class movements. As advanced capitalist societies experienced "unparalleled affluence and stabilization of the economy," it became clear that capitalism was not moving toward collapse but instead was gaining strength.[13] This phenomenon also shaped the working class into a consumer-oriented "mass society" through the increase of the "cultural industries,"[14] which seemed to diminish the possibilities for revolution, and, according to Smart, established the "apparent vitality of the bourgeois order."[15] Herbert Marcuse, a Marxist scholar working within the Frankfurt School, produced one of the most important critiques of US postwar consumer society in his seminal 1964 text, *One-Dimensional Man*.[16] In this book, Marcuse explained how the United States had entered a state of monopoly capitalism which created uniformity and resulted in "effectively neutralizing all opposition and eliminating the second dimension of any kind of critical thinking."[17] In addition to advancing Marxist theory, this text also helped to mobilize the New Left in the 1960s.[18] While attempting to account for this growth of global capitalism, Marxism also had to address the rise of Stalinism and its claims to socialism. Marxist scholars became increasingly critical of the "actually existing socialisms" as manifested in the societies of Eastern Europe, which suggested that there was no longer any model for socialism.[19] Although they argued that Stalin's authoritarian regime did not represent the Marxist conception of socialism, they found that classical Marxist theory lacked compelling ways to critique it.

Finally, the events of 1968 in France and Czechoslovakia challenged conventional Marxist political analysis. The nature of the protests evaded Marxist interpretation for several reasons: they did not stem from an economic critique; they were not based on working-class organization; and they mobilized outside of the trade unions and the political parties of the Left.[20] The protests also formed around new "social subjects or new political groupings" that advocated for issues such as education, women's liberation, ecology, and gay liberation.[21] Although these events were significant for changing political vocabularies, they ultimately failed to impede the global intensification of capitalism, which in the 1980s transformed into Thatcherism (and its American parallel of Reaganism) and the international institution of neoliberalism.

The occurrence of these events interacted with and influenced the development of theory. Throughout this time, theorists had been revising classical Marxist tenets, focusing mainly on its economic determinism and class reductionism in explaining social formations and historical change.[22] The Frankfurt School, established in 1923, created an intellectual group including Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, that was committed to advancing Marxist theory within late capitalism and with a more focused attention to culture.[23] Later in the 1950s, the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham emerged as another scholarly organization attuned to questions of culture that worked broadly within a Marxist framework. The CCCS founded itself as working within a "humanist Marxism," which emphasized the centrality of human experience in Marxist understandings of society and culture.[24] However, throughout the 1970s Louis Althusser explicitly theorized *against* the humanist Marxists.[25] Althusser shifted to a structural understanding of Marxism in which "the conscious subject is no longer located at the center of social activity."[26] Althusser reconceptualized the social formation "as a

structure of relatively autonomous levels of social practices" that complicated the economic determinism argument of classical Marxism and offered a more discursive conception of ideology and subjectivity.[27] Although scholars both accepted and criticized elements of Althusser's theory, it had important effects on both Marxism and cultural studies as it was taken up in various ways.[28]

Colin Sparks illustrates how Althusser's work also opened up the possibility for better integrating the ideas of Antonio Gramsci, whose work had only been translated and widely read in the 1950s.[29] Scholars increasingly turned to Gramscian theories because they offered better ways to explain ideological formation, the phenomena of power and politics outside of the economic level, and how to account for subject-positions outside of class.[30] Particularly Gramsci's reflections of ideology and hegemony—articulated in his *Prison Notebooks* during his incarceration by the Italian Fascist regime between 1926 and 1935—would become embraced as viable alternatives to the concept of "Marxism-Leninism." As Jan Rehmann recognizes, "Gramsci's approach is characterised by a clear, though mostly implicit, anti-Stalinist perspective."[31] Fundamentally opposing economism and class-reductionism, Gramsci approached the concept of ideology not merely in terms of ideas, but rather "as a material ensemble of hegemonic apparatuses in civil society."[32] Importantly, this approach is fundamentally different from the dualistic separation of the "material" and the "ideal" in Marxism-Leninism, as Gramsci posited societal determination as a philosophy of praxis rather than as an objective reality reflected in human thought. Ideology is not to be understood as a direct expression of the economic, Gramsci asserted, nor as a characteristic of great individual personalities. Alternatively, as Rehmann posits, "Gramsci described as 'ideology' those interpretations and explanations that reproduce such a domestication of popular movements in an uncritical way by justifying it or rendering it invisible or 'natural.'"[33]

Gramsci, less concerned with the development of a systematic theory of ideology than with the elaboration of the specific categories of his theory of hegemony, attempted to close a problematic absence in contemporary Marxist thought. Denouncing the Marxist presumption that winning the support of the population could only succeed after a proletarian revolution, Gramsci asserts in its stead that "[there] can and there must be a 'political hegemony' even before assuming government power, and in order to exercise political leadership or hegemony one must not count solely on the power and material force that is given by government."[34] As Rehmann summarizes, "[Gramsci] thus placed at the centre of his theoretical project what the development of state-socialism had neglected with dys-hegemonic and ultimately self-defeating consequences," which allows for the formulation of a theory of hegemony rid of totalizing tendencies.[35]

Throughout the 1970s, scholars used Gramsci's work with post-structural linguistic concepts to develop "articulation theory," which posited "the radical non-determinacy of ideological discourses."[36] Articulation theory offered new avenues for examining politics, resistance, and subjectivity, and it became a dominant framework for cultural studies research.[37] Stuart Hall would later expand upon this framework in his theoretical consideration of discourse as the "dis-articulation" and "re-articulation" of ideological formations.[38] Consequently, Gramscian critique of ideology through the lens of Hall effectively becomes what Rehmann terms "an 'interruptive discourse' that does not primarily unmask the ideological bloc of the opponent from outside, but intervenes in it so as to decompose it, reshape it and build effective elements into a new order."[39]

Nevertheless, it is pertinent to underline that the scholarly embrace of Gramsci marked a "post-Marxist" move, meaning that these theories maintained a clear break from classical Marxism. Consequently, as seen in the various historical developments along with the

intellectual rejection or reconceptualization of many elements of Marxist theory throughout the twentieth century, by the 1980s the notion of a current "crisis of Marxism" had been confirmed. Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau. and Chantal Mouffe may well be considered amongst the scholars who moved away from classical Marxism. Laclau and Mouffe's 1985 book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* would prove to be a turning point in the history of socialist theory, referring to left-wing thought as standing "at a crossroads."[40] Calling for the deconstruction, rather than dismissal, of Marxist traditions, the authors seek to redefine the concept of "hegemony" as intended by Gramsci. In particular, Laclau and Mouffe posit the concept as instrumental in explaining the increased dissemination of "subject positions" in late-capitalist societies, and as potentially providing a more coherent theoretical framework for socialist action within these socially and interpersonally dispersing societies.

Laclau and Mouffe recognize an essentialist paradigm—in which the "proletariat" and the "bourgeoisie" are considered *a priori* enemies—as a major problem within Marxist thought, as it reduces all other forms of antagonism to a consideration of economic class. Consequently, the authors problematize the Marxist calls for a transformation of the relations of production and dismiss as fantastical the resultant "communist utopia." As Marxist thought reduces the complexities of the multifarious societal and political antagonisms to the order of the economic base, Laclau and Mouffe posit their theoretical exploits as "post-Marxist" in an affirmation of the predominance of the political over the consideration of the economic base.

Drawing upon the work of French poststructuralist philosophers in order to support their oppositional reading of the Marxist tradition, Laclau and Mouffe posit the critique of the traditional subject of action as providing the foundation for a radically democratic, authentically left-wing political theory, eradicating the essentialism at the heart of the pregiven, class-based identities of "proletariat" and "bourgeoisie." As the authors state, relinquishing these premises of Marxist thought allows for a non-dichotomous concept of hegemony: "We will thus retain from the Gramscian view the logic of articulation and the political centrality of the frontier effects, but we will eliminate the assumption of a single political space as the necessary framework for those phenomena to arise."[41] Democratic struggles are precisely those that involve a plurality of political spaces.

1988-Defining Publication: *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*

It is this historical and intellectual conjuncture about democratic struggles which Grossberg and Nelson insert in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Nelson and Grossberg's introduction states that the text's purpose is a re-centering of Marxism as an interpretive tool for "the entire field of cultural practices" and situates itself within this evolution of Marxist thought in the postwar period.[42] Their introduction provides a version of the trajectory leading to the current crisis of Marxism previously discussed, but their narrative more specifically attends to how Marxist analyses of culture developed during this time, explaining how studies of Marxism and culture had long been scarce because "culture itself was always viewed as secondary and often as epiphenomenal."[43] Over time, however, the convergence of forces—intellectual, historical, and political— brought about a more capacious view of culture and its role in Marxist thought and politics. As Marxism continued to come into dialogue with a plurality of theoretical discourses and critical vocabularies, Nelson and Grossberg explain, the tradition had not only been expanded but also problematized. In the context of the book, the strongest challenges to Marxism involve critiques of its assertion of a "predefined and stable set of subjects" and, significantly, its seeming inability to adequately account for other types of

oppression not reducible to class conflict.[44] The essays in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* address these issues in various ways as they reveal the influence of poststructural, postmodern, and postcolonial perspectives on Marxist thought. However, despite these various reformulations, the authors are each committed to refining and ultimately strengthening Marxist project, not only for theory but also for practice. For example, Henri Lefebvre's chapter argues that supplementing this theory with outside concepts facilitates "Marxism is an instrument of research and discovery" that seeks to change the world.[45] In addition, Richard Schacht's contribution to the book is to explicate the normative character of Marx's thought found within his texts, arguing that it "*must* have a genuinely normative character if it is to serve as an impetus and guide to revolutionary praxis."[46] Thus, the interventions and rethinkings in this text all work to reinvigorate Marxism as an interpretive framework for the cultural realm.

It is important to note that the book emerged out of a series of events organized by the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1983.[47] Throughout the summer, the Unit held the Marxist Literary Group annual meeting in conjunction with a group of courses that concluded with a large international conference, all centered around Marxism in recognition of the centennial year of Marx's death.[48] The book, which includes thirty-seven essays by prominent figures from a variety of disciplines, represents the type of collaborative intellectual work that characterizes cultural studies scholarship in general. Multiple chapters began as conference presentations, and many of them contain transcripts of the discussion periods, offering a glimpse into the tensions and disputes between these scholars as they reckon with the various challenges to and redefinitions within Marxist discourse that had appeared in the preceding decades. This context thus shows how the text is deeply situated in the "crisis of Marxism" at this time.

The essays in the text include more explicit Gramscian or articulation-theory based studies (West, Hall, Laclau, Mouffe), while others perform rereadings of canonical Marxist texts (Balibar, Negt). Additionally, several case studies, such as those by Fernando Reyes Matta and Hugo Achugar, rearticulate Marxism in a global context and in dialogue with non-Western media and discourses. Overall, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* reveals how major scholars grappled with the "crisis of Marxism" that consolidated throughout the late twentieth century. Both the essays and the discussion sections illustrate these scholars in the process of working through important ideas that would be published later, including two texts also published in this year and discussed in this essay, Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and Stuart Hall's book on Thatcherism, *The Hard Road to Renewal*.

1988-Defining Publication: "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Cultural studies' crisis in Marxism in the 1980s complicated the implicitly Western, working-class subject that ran through much of Marxist critique. According to Morris, "Some of the most radical criticism coming out of the West in the eighties was the result of an interested desire to conserve the subject of the West, or the West as subject."[49] This quote, which paraphrases Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak," provides a poignant starting point to understand how Western-centric notions of the subject were being challenged during this time. Subaltern studies in specific begun to gain more scholarly attention, and Antonio Gramsci's conceptualization of subalternity became an initial entry point into the topic.[50] According to Green, Gramsci identified "slaves, peasants, religious groups, women, different races, and the proletariat as subaltern social groups."[51] While this conception of subalternity assigns a blanket term to understudied subjectivities, in 1988 Spivak complicates Gramsci's notion of subalternity

by defining "subaltern" in terms of colonized subjects, specifically in India.[52] Despite Spivak's cooption of the term "subaltern," Green's essay ultimately offers a critique of Spivak's reading of Gramsci as being fundamentally ahistorical and thus misunderstanding Gramsci's original conception of subalternity. According to Green, Gramsci's use of subalternity is more holistic, being connected to both the potential for liberatory transformation and the inability of subaltern subjectivities to move past their hegemonic oppression. As Green states, "Gramsci's study of the subaltern reveals not only the difficulties involved in subaltern analysis but also the many factors that contribute to group marginalization and the elements which prevent groups from overcoming their marginalization."[53] Based on Green's reading, Spivak's diversion from Gramsci's conception of subalternity is significant, but it is in service of interrogating the failure of a Westernized perspective to truly understand a form of subalternity that is always implicated in race-based oppression, not just class-based oppression.

Despite critiques of her misreadings of Gramsci, Spivak's essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" remains one of the most impactful essays in the cultural studies canon. Spivak's essay problematizes these Western and traditional Marxist notions of the working-class subject through her theorization the subaltern or "third-world" subjectivity. In 1988, when the essay was published, Spivak was an Andrew T. Mellon Professor at the University of Pittsburgh. She founded and was the first director of the graduate program for cultural studies at the University of Pittsburgh in the late 1980s.[54] The first iteration of the essay was published in the journal *Wedge* in 1985 with the title "Can the Subaltern Speak: Speculations on Widow Sacrifice" but was then published in its current form in the edited collection *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* previously discussed in this essay. Spivak's essay takes to task poststructuralist theory for ignoring "the international division of labor" and poses the seminal question of the essay, "can the subaltern speak?"[55] As one of the foremost postcolonial theorists, Spivak's work continues to spur postcolonial and decolonial scholarship in cultural studies and serves as a constant reminder to cultural studies scholars to question "their own implication in intellectual and economic history."[56]

"Can the Subaltern Speak?" opens with a critique of the text "Intellectuals and Power: A Conversation between Michel Foucault and Giles Deleuze." While this friendly conversation about the poststructuralist implications of Marxist thought shows that the structures of "power / desire / and interest" should not be reduced to a coherent narrative, according to Spivak, Foucault and Deleuze "systematically ignore the question of ideology and their own implication in intellectual and economic history."[57] Spivak uses this conversation between the two theorists to discuss the Western-centric notions of the working-class subject and the inherent individual sovereignty afforded to this Westernized subject. Based on this conversation, Foucault and Deleuze err in approaching the Subaltern from an essentialized viewpoint of a still-sovereign subject. Spivak's piece makes salient that by ignoring the international division of labor, Foucault and Deleuze are conceptualizing the subaltern as being on equal footing with a Western, proletariat subjectivity rather than recognizing the subaltern as a uniquely disenfranchised group that does not have an inherent liberatory potential. By subsuming the entire subaltern subjectivity under the same rules and conditions of the disenfranchised Western proletariat, Foucault and Deleuze are indeed guaranteeing that the subaltern cannot speak if it is only ever constituted through a Westernized perspective of white-washed oppression.

Minu Vettamala, in her cogent summary of "Can the Subaltern Speak," notes, "Spivak argues that, surprisingly for these figures, when Foucault and Deleuze talk about oppressed groups such as the working classes, they fall back into precisely these uncritical

notions of 'sovereign subjects' by restoring to them a fully centered consciousness."[58] In other words, the Western working-class subject is inherently imbued with some ability to rise above their economic and social constraints to participate in political discourse: "through alliance politics, [the Western subject] can speak and know their conditions."[59] However, the subaltern subject is not granted those same affordances.

Embedded within Spivak's conceptualization of the subaltern subject is the unearthing of the colonial commitments present in Western notions of subjectivity, and especially in the ever-present construction of the subaltern subject as Other. Despite the greatest efforts of first-world intellectuals to emancipate or "give a voice" to the subaltern subject, Spivak argues that these attempts are always premised on the project of "'recognition' of the Third World through 'assimilation.'"[60] Spivak turns to psychoanalytic theory to conceptualize the subaltern subject without assuming a colonial disposition, and specifically highlight's Derrida's work as having "a long-term usefulness for people outside the First World."[61] For Spivak, Derrida's displacement of the European, ethnocentric subject works to dislodge the subaltern subject from being constituted within the Western working-class subject. This is a project of de-assimilation within which the subaltern subject's radical voicelessness can be recognized apart from the Western working-class subject's claims to individual agency.

Spivak's ultimate conclusion in the essay is that "the subaltern cannot speak." She offers an anecdote in the last section of her essay in which serves to make salient the voicelessness of the subaltern subject in political discourse. The anecdote is about a young Indian girl, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, who committed suicide in North Calcutta in 1926. Though she committed suicide in act of political protest, her suicide was recoded, even by her family, as "a case of illicit love."[62] Even the ultimate sacrifice of her own life for a political cause was not enough to allow the subaltern woman to be heard. According to Vettamala, Spivak "tells the story of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri's suicide not as an example of the Indian woman's inability to speak within Western discourse, but to show that Indian discourse has been so battered by the storms of (colonial) history that it, too, offers no resources for successful communication."[63] Thus, Spivak's essay shows that the roots of colonialism are so deeply embedded into the subaltern subject that the subject is unknowable and unable to speak even to itself.

Subalternity's Lasting Impact

It is difficult to begin to measure the impact of "Can the Subaltern Speak" on the intellectual history of the humanities. The essay has been cited over two thousand times, and countless journal articles have incorporated "Can the Subaltern Speak" into their titles. Though the essay applies to a variety of disciplines and intellectual lineages, its relevance for cultural studies cannot be overstated. Cultural studies continues to be heavily influenced by Marxist critiques. Spivak's essay provides a new lens to view Marxism by asserting that there are certain subjectivities (the subaltern specifically) that are being ignored through traditional Marxist critique. This essay forces cultural studies scholars to reassess their commitments to Western notions of culture and subjectivity and instead recognize that they may be always already constituting the subaltern as Other through their invocation of traditional Marxism. Her essay also complicates the narrative that Western academics have the propensity to "emancipate" subaltern Others through trying to give them a "voice" by studying their cultural practices. Instead, this kind of work only succeeds in recognition of the subaltern through assimilating them into a Western context of understanding.

Despite this shift in cultural studies towards a decentering of the Western subject, Western notions of prosperity and equality reigned supreme in an American economic

context, leaving little room for Westerners outside of the academy to sympathize with subaltern subjectivities. In 1988, the ideals of Reaganism were still very much at the center of political thought in the United States. According to Hutchinson, Reaganism represented the "New Right," or a brand of conservatism that "proposed the removal of state intervention from a free market, and the gradual dismantling of the public sector."[64] The rise of Reaganism coincided with an "internationalization of capital flows" and a shifting of the American labor force from "being predominantly male, white, full-time, skilled, unionized and based in the manufacturing sector" to an increasingly "mixed-sex, multi-racial . . . part-time or short-term and non-unionized" workforce.[65] Though Reaganism was not heavily studied by cultural studies scholars, Thatcherism, a politically similar movement to Reaganism in the United Kingdom, became a main topic of inquiry for British cultural studies scholars.

Contextualizing Thatcherism

"Thatcherism," defined by the *Routledge Dictionary of Economics* as "an attitude of frugality towards public expenditure and a belief in the supremacy of market forces," draws its name from Margaret Thatcher's time as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990.[66] As the first woman to hold the office, she notoriously placed a heavy emphasis on monetary control, the privatization of nationalized industries, and the removal of labor market stringencies. Officially outlined during her cabinet's first budget speech in 1979, the program of that would come to be known as "Thatcherism" was founded on four principles: the strengthening of economic incentives, the reduction of the burden of financing the public sector, the reduction in the role of the state to increase freedom of individual choice, and increased responsibility in collective bargaining.

The year 1988 marked the halfway point of Thatcher's third term as Prime Minister, in which she had finally achieved dominance within the Conservative Party after two successive and spectacular election successes. The United Kingdom's economy was prospering, spearheaded by chancellor of the exchequer Nigel Lawson's economic reform. Living standards were steadily increasing for most of the year, certainly until the great stock exchange crash of October 1988. As Eric Evans points out in *Thatcher and Thatcherism*, no party had sustained its majority over three successive general elections since 1945, which allowed Thatcher the "unprecedented authority that she clearly intended to use to achieve her vision of change."[67] Reshuffling her cabinet to consolidate her power, she would acerbically reflect on the period as "the single most devastating defeat ever inflicted upon democratic socialism in Britain."[68]

Additionally, Thatcher's third term would be remembered for her restructuring of taxation. Introduced in March of 1988, the cabinet announced an income tax structure comprised of only two rates: a standard rate of 25 percent and a higher rate of 40 percent. The prospect of reduced taxation allowed the Conservatives to present themselves as the party of low taxation during the 1987 election. Furthermore, the Trade Union and Employment Acts of 1988, which allowed individuals greater autonomy and legal rights when working for a union, endeared the working classes to the Conservative Party. Thatcher's reign would come to be supported by constituents who had never voted for the Conservative Party before. Appealing to the working classes' aspirations for self-improvement in both rhetoric and policy, Thatcher expanded the service sector (and by extension, the middle class), which historically harbors Conservative sympathies, at the expense of manual labor.[69] However, whereas Thatcher's policies and populist rhetoric helped her gain working-class voters, she alienated many of the highly educated middle classes.

1988-Defining Publication: *The Hard Road to Renewal*

In *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (1988), Stuart Hall collects some of his key articles written between 1978 and 1988 (first published in books and journals such as *Marxism Today* and *The New Socialist*), in an effort to "define the character and significance of the political project of "Thatcherism" and the crisis of the left which it has precipitated."[70] Writing in 1988, Hall tackled Thatcherism at its arguable peak. His book voiced the severe critiques of Thatcherism articulated by much of the British leftist intelligentsia, though, as Evans underlines, "rarely in the kind of newspapers that Thatcher's new supporters read."[71] Ironically, or possibly in retribution, the university funding system was radically reformed in 1988. Implored to cut costs and seek external funding, universities' endowments shrunk up to 25 percent in the following decade.[72]

Conceived as a series of interventions against the political climate of its day, the book's essays are presented in four distinct parts. The essays in Part One focus on the analysis of Thatcherism, whereas those in Part Three concentrate on what Hall recognizes as "the crisis of the left."[73] These two narrative threads are connected via Part Two, which explicates a wider set of concerns and histories. Finally, Part Four provides both a conclusion regarding the state of the left, and concrete recommendations for its renewal.

Hall posits the ideology of Thatcherism as a perversion of quintessential concepts of "Englishness," creating "new discursive articulations" between liberal discourses and the conservative themes of "tradition, family and nation, respectability, patriarchalism and order."[74] Culturally, Thatcherism is defined as a form of "regressive modernization"—"the attempt to 'educate' and discipline the society into a particularly regressive version of modernity."[75] Hall explains his decade-long focus on politics and ideology as a deliberate strategy, chosen to formulate "a theoretical and political language on the left which rigorously avoids the temptations to economism, reductionism or teleological forms of argument."[76] Consequently, many of the collected essays attempt to achieve a deeper understanding of Thatcherism's populist rhetoric. Hall recognizes a contradictory and overdetermined connection "between Thatcherism's strategic interventions in popular life, the reactionary character of its social project, and its directive and disciplinary exercise of state power," which he terms "authoritarian populism."[77]

Hall's explication of class struggles was greatly influenced by the work of Gramsci, as Gramsci understood the importance of determinants other than economic conditions of production and acknowledged how the dominant classes reach across society to forge hegemonic relationships. As Owen Worth explains in "Stuart Hall, Marxism without Guarantees, and 'The Hard Road to Renewal,'" Hall's Gramscian approach "looked to widen the manner in which Marxism had dealt with aspects of social agency such as the nation, popular culture, forms of beliefs and religion"[78]—all of which were employed by the ruling classes in an effort to win the "hearts and minds" of the general public.[79]

Indeed, it would be folly to read Hall's 1988 collection without acknowledging the importance of his article "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees."[80] In this article, Hall sets out beyond the traditionally deterministic boundaries of Marxist analysis to allow for the aforementioned articulation of popular culture "so crucial for the advancement of Cultural Studies as a distinct discipline."[81] By positing hegemony as an open-ended process in which dominant classes constantly seek to maintain their influence, Hall employed the Gramscian idea that class formation is fluidly constructed across every level of society. Disallowing the titular "guarantees" to be made regarding the positioning of social practices, Hall underlines how forms of agency shape these practices in different, contrasting, and contradictory ways.[82] Marxism without

guarantees thus should be understood as the "necessary openness of historical development to practice and struggle."[83] Thatcherism, then, can be understood as a hegemonic project which employs "authoritarian populism" to simultaneously charm and divide Great Britain during large parts of the 1980s.[84]

Whereas Hall writes a contemptuous critique of Thatcherism, he nevertheless does not allow the left to remain unscathed. Hall underlines the damage caused by "Labour's failure to establish itself as a leading cultural force in civil society, popular culture and urban life," as it allowed for the rise of the force of Thatcherism which is "capable in this historical moment of unhingeing it from below."[85] Hall considers the left's renewal as contingent upon a qualitative change in politics, aimed at developing a counter-hegemonic strategy intended to redefine "what the whole project of socialism now means."[86] Turning his back on "the spurious oscillations of optimism and pessimism, or the triumphalism which so often pass for thought on the traditional left," Hall pleads for a concrete and strategic commitment of the left to the construction of a new political will.[87]

Importantly, Hall does not consider his recommendations for the renewal of the left a fixed program, to be mechanically implemented through the formal bureaucracies of the left. Instead, he sees his proposals as explicating some of the key questions for what we might call the "agenda of renewal," which allows the left renewal "by precisely occupying *the same world* that Thatcherism does, and building from that a *different* form of society."[88] Importantly, Hall holds the left culpable for failing to understand how "consumer capitalism" generates popularity in the minds of the mass of ordinary people, as this was one of the foundational building blocks of Thatcherism.[89] To contest Thatcherism, Hall argues that "we must first attend 'violently' to things as they are, without illusions or false hopes, if we are to transcend the present."[90] The renewal of the left requires the positing of a viable alternative to Thatcherism and dealing with the realities of the era.

Conclusion

Although fissures in the disciplinary underpinnings of cultural studies were becoming more readily apparent, 1988 was a year of productive growth that challenged core components of cultural studies in important ways. The various "crises" that the discipline experienced in the late 1980s signified a stretching of cultural studies beyond its starkly Marxist and Western roots. The "crisis in Marxism" allowed for Marxist critique to be reinterpreted not as a stable, fixed set of ideologies, but as a theoretical framework with implications for a vast array of subjectivities and discourses of power beyond class struggles. Similarly, the "crisis of the Left" forced cultural studies scholars to grapple with issues of social hegemony and to imagine new avenues of resistance in the face of a militantly conservative Western world. The challenges and growth that cultural studies experienced in 1988 still mark a defining moment in the discipline's history.

Notes

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25. Smart, *Foucault, Marxism, and Critique*, 16. ⮐

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